

FAHC Recommended for New Psychiatric Hospital

The Vermont State Hospital Futures Advisory Group, with only one dissenting vote, approved on Wednesday a number of recommendations from the inpatient work group for a new psychiatric hospital at, or within sight of, Fletcher Allen Health Care, and for building additional inpatient capacity at one or more other hospitals.

Human Services Secretary Michael Smith accepted the recommendations and expressed satisfaction at the outcome. Smith said that work would begin immediately with Fletcher Allen “to develop details of what this project might look like.”

The size of the new hospital will depend on the outcome of a pending actuarial study (see RFP, posted on the Mental Health Update webpage).

The Futures Group also unanimously approved a statement that all of its recommendations, including its formal vote regarding the inpatient facility, are contingent on Vermont’s going ahead with the entire Futures Plan as presented to the Legislature by then-Human Services Secretary Charlie Smith last February. The scope of this plan includes the creation or strengthening of many other services and supports that can assist persons with mental illnesses to avoid hospitalization. These services include such things as the additional non-hospital facilities, additional housing for mental health patients, and additional community services and peer supports.

Architectural Selection Process Begins

The selection process began on Thursday to choose an architectural firm to begin the first steps toward design of the new psychiatric hospital that will take the place of Vermont State Hospital. Health Department staff, aided by Dr. Andrew Pomerantz, chief of psychiatry for the White River Junction Veterans Administration Medical Center, and Anne Donahue, a Futures Advisory Group member, met with staff from the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) to review submissions received in response to a recent RFP. (A copy of the RFP is posted on the Mental Health Update webpage, for reference.) The outcome of the process will be a recommendation to the BGS Commissioner, who will make the final selection. BGS hopes to award a contract by December 1, develop program of space needs by January 31, evaluate sites by February 28, have schematic designs done by April 14, and develop a budget by April 30.

Draft Hospital Policies Posted

Three draft policies for Vermont State Hospital have been posted for comment on the Mental Health Update webpage. One, the Pre-Placement Visit and Short Visit Policy, is new, and the other two are amended policies: the Restricted Items and Search Policy and the Patient Elopement/Late Return Policy.

Governing Body Gets Patient, Employee Safety Data

The Vermont State Hospital Governing Body received information at its meeting on Wednesday about patient and employee injuries, the data coming from the hospital's new tracking system.

- **Patient Safety:** During October, there were eight patient injuries: one was related to a self-injury, two were cuts, one was a fall, three consisted of observed assaults by other patients, and one was related to a pre-existing health condition complication.
- **Employee Safety:** There were 12 employee injuries, 10 of them involving patients. Five of the 12 resulted from unprovoked physical assaults by patients. Of the remaining, two consisted of strains or sprains, two involved patient redirection, two were cuts or abrasions, and one involved lifting. Data collected since the tracking system began in July show a decreasing trend in employee injuries from the 21 reported in July to the 12 reported in October.
- **Variance Reports:** There were three "variances" from normal procedures reported in October. One was considered a risk management issue (defined as a "facility or operational concern likely to have negative consequence, a hazard potential or minor negative consequence to a known hazard, or a personnel activity with possible negative consequences"); in this case, the issue involved a personnel matter. The other two variances were considered minor events ["brief facility or operation interruption (anticipated or unanticipated); minimal permanent damage results"]. There were no major events reported. All issues were corrected immediately, or staff had made plans for correction as of Thursday.

Second DOJ Meeting Held

Representatives from the Health Department and Attorney General's Office met on Tuesday, for the second time, with lawyers for the federal Department of Justice (DOJ). The meeting was held at DOJ's request to continue discussions about the hospital's corrective action plan to address deficiencies cited in by DOJ following an inspection during the summer of 2004. The state and federal attorneys have been in contact in recent weeks. There is substantial agreement between the two sides, but discussions continue. Compliance with any corrective action plan would be monitored by DOJ for a period of several years or until private replacement services are in place and the state hospital is closed.

VSH Census

The Vermont State Hospital census was 41 as of midnight Thursday night. The average census for the past 45 days was slightly less than 45.

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